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General Edward G. Lansdale and the Folksongs of Americans in the Vietnam War

The occupational folksongs of Americans, both military and civilian, who served in the Vietnam War are closely related to those of earlier wars. They are also strongly influenced by the folksong revival and by country and popular music. Our knowledge of these songs is almost entirely due to the work of General Edward Geary Lansdale, who, in addition to his extensive collecting of folksongs, made use of folklore as a technique of psychological warfare and as a means of conveying intelligence.

TO MOST OF US, the Vietnam War has a rock and roll soundtrack. Almost every novel, memoir, or oral history of the war by a veteran mentions the music that the author listened to in country. All the songs of the '60s were part of life in the combat zone; troops listened to music in the bush and in the bunkers (Perry 1968). Sony radios, Akai stereos, and Teac tape decks were easily available, American music was performed live by the ubiquitous Filipino rock bands, AFVN Radio broadcast round the clock, and new troops arrived weekly with the latest records from the States. GI-operated underground radio stations, playing mostly hard acid rock, were part of the in-country counter-culture of the war. Even the enemy contributed to the sound of American music on the airwaves; Radio Hanoi played rock and soul music, while a series of soft-voiced, Oxford-accented women announcers known collectively to the troops as Hanoi Hannah competed with AFVN disk jockey Chris Noel for the hearts and minds of the American soldiers. The troops had their own top forty: songs about going home, like "Five Hundred Miles," or "Leaving on a Jet Plane," or darker or more cynical album cuts that reflected their experiences: "Run Through the Jungle," "Bad Moon Rising," "Paint It Black," or "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down." References to popular music are an integral part of the language of the war: "Puff the Magic Dragon" or "Spooky" meant a cargo plane outfitted with machine guns, "rock and roll" meant fire from an M-16 on full automatic. But there were other songs in Vietnam, too—the songs made by the American men and women, civilian and military, who served there, for themselves.

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Some of these were part of the traditional occupational folklore of the military. The pilots who flew off the carriers and out of Thailand sang songs that were known by the men who flew in the two World Wars and the Korean War: "Give Me Operations," "Save A Fighter Pilot's Ass," "There Are No Fighter Pilots Down in Hell." Captain Kris Kristofferson rewrote one of the most popular of all Korean War songs, "Itazuke Tower," in Germany and his helicopter pilot buddies carried it to Vietnam where it was sung as "Phan Rang Tower" and reworked again by Phantom jock Dick Jonas as "Ubon Tower." They learned RAF songs like "Stand to Your Glasses" and British Army songs like "I Don't Want to Join the Army" from the Australians who served in Vietnam. Some of the songs grew directly out of the Vietnam experience: in the spring of 1970 the men of the second battalion of the 502nd brigade of the 101st Airborne Division created one of the most powerful songs of the war, "The Boonie Rat Song," and appointed a keeper of the company song (Del Vecchio 1983:i, 100-101; Rosenberg 1988). In some cases both the words and music were original; usually new lyrics were set to folk, country, or popular tunes. Barry Sadler's "Ballad of the Green Berets" alone spawned dozens of parodies.¹

These songs served as a strategy for survival, as a means of unit bonding and definition, as entertainment, and as a way of expressing emotion. All of the traditional themes of military folksong can be found in these songs: praise of the great leader ("We Flew in the Wolfpack with Robin Olds"), celebration of heroic deeds ("Doumer Bridge"), laments for the death of comrades ("Blue Four"), disparagement of other units ("Green Flight Pay"), and complaints about incompetent officers ("The LT Who Never Returned") and vainglorious rear-echelon troops ("Saigon Warrior"). Like soldiers from time immemorial they sang of epic drinking bouts ("Beer La Rue") and encounters with exotic young women ("Saigon Girls"). Songs provided a means for the expression of protest, fear and frustration, of grief and of longing for home. Some of the songs show empathy with the enemy; I recently ran across a very gentle fighter pilots' song presented from the point of view of a girl in love with a North Vietnamese truck driver on the Ho Chi Minh trail. Others, especially late in the war, are extremely violent: "Strafe the Town and Kill the People," "Chocolate-Covered Napalm" and "We're Going to Rape and Kill."

Civilians serving with civilian agencies such as AID (Agency for International Development), CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support), the State Department and the CIA had their own songs. Jim Bullington, who was working for AID in Quang Tri in 1968, wrote "Yes, We Are Winning" while he was in hiding in Hue during the Tet Offensive of that year (Bullington 1985). In Dong Tam, Emily Strange (Red Cross), with her friend Barbara Hagar (USO), wrote "Incoming," complaining about having to go to the bunkers every night, and sang it for enthusiastic grunts on the firebases (Strange 1988). Employees of OCO (Office of Civil Operations) and JUSPAO (Joint United States Public Affairs Office) contributed "Where Have

All the Field Reps Gone" and "God Smite Thee, Barry Zorthian." They griped about the unpunctuality of Air America flights ("Damn Air America, You're Always Late") and the futility of pacification efforts ("We Have Pacified This Land One Hundred Times"). The Cosmos Tabernacle Choir was composed of CIA agents who used to meet in the Cosmos Bar near the American Embassy. Their songs tended to be both cynical and humorous; "Counting Geckos on the Wall," "Deck the Halls with Victor Charlie" and "I Feel Like a Coup Is Coming On." The group even had a Cosmos Command patch made, showing crossed Bau Muoi Ba bottles over an explosion, which can still be seen on the walls of bars in McLean and Langley (Allen 1988).

All the streams of American musical tradition meet in the songs of the Vietnam War. The influence of the folksong revival was strong, especially in the early or adviser period of the war. Many of the soldiers, especially the young officers who had been exposed to the revival in college, were already experienced musicians when they arrived in Vietnam. A few brought instruments with them, others ordered them from the United States (Lem Genovese remembers buying a mail-order autoharp from Sears Roebuck) or purchased Japanese guitars from the PX or on the local economy. Many of them sang together in Kingston Trio-style trios or quartets: the Merry-men, the Blue Stars, the Intruders, the Four Blades. Country music groups were also formed in Vietnam and many songs are based on country favorites: "I Fly the Line," "Short Fat Sky," and "Ghost Advisors." One of the great songwriters of the war, Dick Jonas, wrote almost entirely in this tradition. Later in the war, many of the young soldiers had played in rock bands before being drafted and this, too, is reflected in the music. Some of the songs of the antiwar movement at home were also sung in Vietnam; one night at Khe Sanh, Michael Herr saw a group of grunts sitting in a circle with a guitar singing "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" (1977:148).

Joseph Treaster, a member of *The New York Times* Saigon bureau, wrote in 1966:

Almost every club has a resident musician, usually a guitar player, whom the men crowd around, singing songs about their lives in a strange country and the war they are fighting. The songs are laced with cynicism and political innuendoes and they echo the frustrations of the "dirty little war" which has become a dirty big one. Above all, the songs reflect the wartime Yank's ability to laugh at himself in a difficult situation. The songs grow fast as first one man, then another, throws in a line while the guitar player searches for chords. The tunes are usually old favorites. [1966:104]

Photographs in the DOD Still Media Archives and paintings in the Army and Marine art collections show soldiers playing guitars in bars, in bunkers, or while sitting in the sun at base camp. One Navy photograph shows a group called the Westwinds playing for wounded Marines aboard the assault landing ship *Iwo Jima*. Three members of the Merry-men met and first played together on a troopship bound for Vietnam. Joseph Tusso (1971:2-3) gives a vivid de-

scription of formal parties at an Air Force Officers' Club in Thailand; solitary singers or groups provided entertainment during the meal and broadsides were sometimes distributed so everyone could join in. In my own collection I have tapes of performances at farewell parties and concerts, in officers' clubs and bars, hootches and bunkers.

The same technology that made it possible for the troops to listen to rock music "from the Delta to the DMZ" provided ideal conditions for the transmission of folklore. The widespread availability of inexpensive portable tape recorders meant that concerts, music nights at the mess, or informal bar performances could be recorded, copied, and passed along to friends. Some especially popular groups made tapes for their fans and several singers had records cut. We know that these songs were occasionally played on AFVN Radio and they were probably also played on the "bullshit net" which the troops operated illegally on field radios. The extremely high rate of troop mobility meant that these songs spread rapidly.

Some of this music even had official sponsorship. In the early 1960s the USIS (United States Information Service) sponsored tours of Vietnam by American folk groups, although these mostly played for Vietnamese villagers rather than American troops. Especially talented performers and groups were often picked to represent their units at commanders' conferences or to entertain visiting dignitaries. In 1965 Hershel Gober formed a band called the Black Patches and was sent on tour to sing for the troops, including a "command performance" for General Westmoreland. Later in the war Bill Ellis, who wrote songs about the First Cavalry Division, was taken out of combat and sent around to sing for men on the remote firebases, where USO performers could not go. He also cut a record, a copy of which was given to each member of the division on his return to the United States. A few of these performers were filmed or recorded for radio or television release over the Armed Forces Network or in the United States.

No folklorist thought to collect these songs, although Saul Broudy (1969) based his M.A. thesis on a tape and a songbook of helicopter pilot songs that he acquired during his tour of duty in Vietnam. Two Air Force officers, Joseph Tusso (1971) and James Durham (1970), published excellent collections of song texts they had learned in country, and Bill Getz included Vietnam War material in his superb two-volume work on Air Force songs (1981, 1986). However, with the exception of the Tusso article, which was published in *Folklore Forum* in 1971, these sources were not easily accessible to folklorists. It is to another Air Force officer, Major General Edward G. Lansdale (1908–87) (see Figure 1), that we owe most of our knowledge of the songs of the Vietnam War.

Lansdale, a legendary figure in his own right (former CIA director William E. Colby regarded him as one of the ten greatest spies of all time), is best known to military historians for his unorthodox approach to counterinsurgent warfare. In his introduction to Cecil Currey's excellent biography of Lansdale, Colby writes:



Figure 1. Edward G. Lansdale, c. 1953. [Photo courtesy of Pat Lansdale]

His battles were over ideas and his weapons were the tools to convince, not kill. His influence with Asians came more from his preference to listen to them than from a compulsion to tell them, an unfortunately rare attribute among the other Americans they knew. He was more interested in their songs and stories than in their armaments and believed the people's rich traditions and history were more important than their military's stockpiles in the long run. [1989:xi]

Most of Lansdale's career was dedicated to furthering the cause of democracy in emerging nations, primarily in the Philippines and Vietnam. He was convinced that a government's best weapon against Communist insurgency was the genuine support and trust of the population, a belief that ran counter to the conventional American military wisdom which relied on force. He was fascinated by the traditions and customs of the people with whom he worked and made brilliant use of applied folklore both as a technique of psychological warfare and as means of conveying intelligence. He also compiled and edited one of the finest collections of occupational folksong ever made.

Lansdale's interest in the possibilities of folklore as a technique of psychological warfare dated back to his Office of Strategic Services (OSS) days in World War II. In 1943 he circulated a memo on Japanese proverbs pointing out that "a surprising number of these sayings—clothed with credibility by centuries of usage—can be made applicable to modern events and can, in the opinion of this section, be used effectively against the Japanese" (1943:1).

In 1945 Lansdale was assigned to the Philippines. His brother Ben, who had served there during the war, remembers that Lansdale asked him if he could remember any tunes he might have heard the Filipino soldiers sing. When Ben could not, Lansdale pulled out his harmonica, played a few songs and asked if any of them sounded familiar. He suggested that such things might be important; he wanted to understand and communicate with the Filipinos and one way would be to know their songs, "something they hold dear in their hearts" (Currey 1989:26–27).

Lansdale always held that the proper place for an intelligence operative was with people; it was necessary to talk with them, eat and drink with them, learn about their dreams and share their interests. When he wanted to learn about the Communist-led Hukbalahap guerrillas, he simply made use of intelligence sources to determine the most likely routes they would take when escaping from superior numbers of Filipino soldiers, camped out on the trail alone and waited for them to appear (Currey 1989:39). He picked up many of the folktales and traditions of the barrios and wrote in his memoirs about the "mournful singing of men and women known as *nangangaluluwa* as they walked from house to house on All Saints' night telling of lost and hungry souls" (1972:72). He also amassed a considerable collection of Filipino songs in manuscript and on tape.

In 1950 Lansdale returned to the Philippines to advise Philippine Army Intelligence Services in the fight against the Huk insurgency. In the spring of that year, he put together a special school for Filipino army officers training in the United States, using as instructors officers who had had practical experience

in psychological warfare. "People came on their own, they paid their own way," Lansdale remembered years later, "[to] reminisce [and tell] war stories about World War II." Instruction focused on incidents where one military force had been deceived and tricked by its enemies (Currey 1989:68-69).

He made good use of these techniques, and of his knowledge of Filipino superstitions, in one of his most famous exploits. The Filipino army had not been able to evict a squadron of Huks from the area of a garrison town. A combat psychological warfare squad was brought in and, under Lansdale's direction, planted stories among town residents of an *asuang* or vampire living on the hill where the Huks were based. A famous local soothsayer, they said, had predicted that men with evil in their hearts would become its victim. After giving the stories time to circulate, the squad set up an ambush on a trail used by the Huks and, when a patrol came by, snatched the last man. They punctured his neck with two holes, held the body upside down until it was drained of blood, and put it back on the trail. The next day the entire Huk squadron moved out of the area (Lansdale 1960:6-7).

He also made use of his interest in music as a way of getting a message across. In 1953 he arranged for the recording and pressing of a "Magsaysay Mambo" and "Magsaysay March" which were used to good effect in the presidential campaign of that year (Lansdale 1953:1).

Lansdale was sent to Vietnam in 1954 and at once began to familiarize himself with Vietnamese history, society, and customs. He was especially interested in soothsayers and developed a concept of the use of astrology for psychological warfare in Southeast Asia. He noticed that, although soothsayers did a thriving business, none of their predictions were issued in printed form. He decided that it might be a good idea to print an almanac for 1955 containing predictions of the most famous astrologers, especially those who foresaw a dark future for the Communists and predicted unity in the south. Several soothsayers were willing to cooperate, although Lansdale was interested to notice that they all insisted that they were following professional ethics and that playing tricks would be beneath them. He also noted that some of the things they foretold actually came true. Copies were shipped by air to Haiphong and then smuggled into Viet Minh territory. The almanac, which was sold for a small price to avoid the appearance of propaganda, became an instant best-seller in Haiphong and a large reprint order was sold out as soon as it hit the stands. The unexpected profits were donated to the funds helping the refugees from the North (Lansdale 1971a, 1972:226-227; *Pentagon Papers* 1971:I, 582).

Lansdale's interest in the soothsayers continued after his return to Vietnam in 1965 as head of the Senior Liaison Office (SLO) in Saigon. On May 18, 1967, he wrote to Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker:

It is suggested that the U.S. Mission compile a list of the personal soothsayers and astrologers who service leading Vietnamese personalities, particularly those who will be candidates in the forthcoming Presidential campaign. These soothsayers have a decided influence on the activities

of many of the Vietnamese leaders, and their guidance may not always coincide with U.S. objectives. In turn, most soothsayers are vulnerable to certain influences, also.

Perhaps such a project is already being carried out, unknown to me. If so, I can think of some folks such as General Loan who deserve a bit of influencing. [Lansdale 1968:1]

He also circulated memos on proverbs as a clue to Vietnamese attitudes, the importance of being aware of jokes circulated by the Vietnamese about Americans, auspicious dates, and the traditional meanings of colors for the Vietnamese people. He alerted the ambassador to political stories being circulated before the senatorial election of 1967 and expressed his hope that these stories would have lost currency by the time there was a real influx of journalists and other "foreign observers" to cover the elections, who might well believe such stories told by prominent citizens. "I suggest that we keep alert to the folk lore, be aware of the reasons for some of the kookier questions we may be asked by the visitors" (1967a). His interest in the customs of the Vietnamese was endless; when he was invited to an engagement party and a wedding in the summer of 1967 he sent descriptions of the events to the ambassador and the members of the U.S. Mission Council which are models of ethnographic field notes.²

In 1966 Lansdale issued a short dictionary of Vietnamese slang terms. He told Currey in 1984:

I noticed . . . at big gatherings, where Americans and Vietnamese mixed at official functions, the Vietnamese-speaking Americans occasionally got baffled looks on their faces. I asked them about it and was told they simply didn't understand what was being said. I went to the Vietnamese and asked them. They told me they made up slang to get around Americans who spoke Vietnamese. I put out a dictionary with political slang in it. The Vietnamese had nicknames for all sorts of people and events and constantly added new ones. Along with general slang, they had names for leading Americans—the ambassador, the generals, the AID people. Westmoreland was "Mr. Four Stars." I was the "General." They had, I finally discovered, about six or seven of these damned nicknames for me. [Currey 1989:406]

In the same year Brigadier General Fritz Freund, who was at that time assigned to JUSPAO, was given charge of a Chieu Hoi operation, a program to encourage members of the Viet Cong to desert and join the other side. Usually these were tied to offensive combat action, with the assumption that the Viet Cong would be discouraged by the bombing or the battle and choose that moment to quit. Lansdale suggested that many of the enemy guerrillas were growing homesick, and that they would be missing their families especially at Tet, when Vietnamese traditionally visit their families and eat a huge holiday dinner. He proposed to Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky that they put on a Tet dinner at all the Chieu Hoi centers and advertise by propaganda leaflet that anyone who came in and surrendered at that time would be given a big meal and that efforts would be made to get him back to his family. Leaflets with the Tet dinner menu were duly distributed and more Viet Cong came in and surrendered than at any previous time (Lansdale 1971a).

In 1955 Lansdale met the Vietnamese singer Pham Duy. Pham Duy was a formally trained musician who was interested in Vietnamese folk music, collected it for over twenty years and eventually published a book on the subject (1975). He was also an extremely talented songwriter, whose songs were taken up by guerrillas, students, and villagers at the time of Vietnam's struggle for independence from France; it was his songs that the soldiers sang when they hauled the guns across the mountains to Dien Bien Phu (Yoh 1988). In 1955 he broke with the Viet Minh and came south, where he went to work for Radio Saigon.

In 1965 Lansdale visited a camp of college students in Gia Dinh, where they were building housing for refugees who had come from central Vietnam. Classes were about to start and the young volunteers were working overtime. While he watched, a crew started on a new building and broke into a song that was picked up by the other crews, Pham Duy's "Vietnam, Vietnam." Later he heard the song sung by troops, by the Rural Construction/Revolutionary Development cadre who served in the hamlets and countryside, and by workers in the cities (Lansdale 1966, 1967b). Lansdale urged Pham Duy and other composers to write songs to help raise the morale of the Vietnamese people; the American and Vietnamese governments occasionally acted as patrons for concerts of this material.

Often American and Vietnamese singers performed together. Bill Stubbs, who served as Public Affairs Officer for USIS at the American Cultural Center in Hue, remembers an evening when Steve Addis, who was touring Vietnam for the Cultural Presentations Program of the State Department, and Pham Duy sang together in a boat on the Perfume River, while the young girls who worked the river as prostitutes clustered around in their little boats and accompanied them on mandolins (Stubbs 1988). With Lansdale's encouragement, Pham Duy put together a singing group to perform for the Vietnamese army in combat areas, and several propaganda films were based on his songs. At parties at the villa where the SLO team lived, Pham Duy first tried out songs that Lansdale later heard being sung by schoolchildren in the villages (Lansdale 1966:1-3, 1967b, 1978:1-2).

Lansdale himself was a good performer on the harmonica; when he first arrived in Saigon in 1954 he and his Philippine security man, Procolo Mojica, who played guitar, amused themselves and guests by playing duets (Currey 1989:142). When he returned for his second tour in 1965, he began recording the singing at parties at his villa at 194 Cong Ly. Pham Duy was a regular singer on these occasions, but other Vietnamese guests, students, military men and bureaucrats, including Prime Minister Ky and Nguyen Duc Thang, the minister of rural rehabilitation, also contributed songs. The whole cast of the early years of the war appears on these tapes: visiting American dignitaries and newsmen, Philippine and Korean visitors, American soldiers serving as advisers to the Vietnamese military, and American civilians working for the CIA, USIS, CORDS, the Foreign Service or AID. Jim Bullington, serving as vice

counsel in Hue, occasionally dropped in to sing the latest songs from I Corps and Hershel Gober, who was working as a subsector adviser for MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam) in Rach Gia on the Gulf of Siam, would hop a flight up to Saigon to record a song which he had just written (Gober 1987).

Early in 1967 Lansdale put together a tape of 51 of these songs, as a "report from the Senior Liaison Officer of the U.S. Mission in Vietnam to top U.S. officials." He wrote a script that explained circumstances of the composition and performance of the songs and Hank Miller, who had joined his team from Voice of America, edited the tape and did the narration. Lansdale sent copies to Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, Robert McNamara, Dean Rusk, Walt Rostow, Henry Cabot Lodge, Henry Kissinger and General William Westmoreland, among others. "I had hoped," he wrote later, "to catch some of the emotions of the Vietnam War in these folk songs and, with them, try to impart more understanding of the political and psychological nature of the struggle to those making decisions" (Lansdale 1975). He was worried that these decisions were being made outside of the context of the needs and feelings of the Vietnamese people and of the American troops (Lansdale 1971b). Unfortunately, Washington was not listening to what Les Cleveland has described as "perhaps the only example known to military history of folklore being used for the transmission of intelligence" (Cleveland 1986:9). "I got form letters back from all those people," Lansdale said. "It was very disappointing to me and I don't know to this day whether they ever listened to them or not" (1971b).³ He presented a copy of this collection, *In the Midst of War*, to the Music Division of the Library of Congress in 1974.

Lansdale returned to the United States in 1968. For the next eight years he worked intermittently on a second collection of songs by Americans in the Vietnam War. Friends still serving in Vietnam sent him tapes of new material and he also made a systematic effort to fill in the gaps in his earlier collection. At gatherings in his house in Virginia he asked singer friends to perform songs from the Saigon days of which he did not have recordings. A special "Cosmos bar reunion" was held in 1975 to record the songs of the Cosmos Command (Maxa 1975:4). In the spring of 1977 he presented the Library of Congress with a superb second collection of 160 songs, *Songs by Americans in the Vietnam War*. Unlike the first collection, which was arranged thematically, this one was presented chronologically: the first 60 songs, including most of the English-language material from the first collection, were from the advisory period from 1962 to 1965, the rest were from the U.S. combat period from 1965 to 1972. Again, Lansdale wrote the script and Hank Miller did the narration and the editing, which was a truly formidable task. Lansdale identified each singer, often gave details about the circumstances under which the song was performed and sometimes included several variants.

Lansdale has left us no formal statement about these collections. In the notes to *In the Midst of War* he states, "In 18 months, there have been many tapes.

The songs they record are part of the history of a long, long war—and unexpectedly, we realize now that all along we have been historians without meaning to be—that these tapes tell the story of a human side of war which should be told” (1967b). In the letter to the Music Division that accompanied the gift of *Songs by Americans in the Vietnam War* he wrote,

This collection is given to you so that the songs can be available to all who are interested. The emotions and thoughts of Americans in the Vietnam War, expressed in these songs mostly sung for comrades and virtually unknown in the United States during the war, deserve being preserved as unusual insights into the feelings of the Americans who fought it. They should prove invaluable to the scholar or historian seeking a true understanding. [1977]

It is true that these songs can give the historian a unique perspective on the war. “The Battle of Long Khanh,” sung by the men of the 6th Royal Australian Regiment, “The Battle for the Ia Drang Valley,” written by James Multon of the First Cavalry, (Lansdale 1976) or “The Ballad of Ap Bac,” which was sung in the clubs at Soc Trang and Tan Son Nhut and which Captain Richard Ziegler included in his detailed notes on the battle, include information that is never found in the official after-action reports. As Neil Sheehan has argued, ballads of battles composed by the men who fight them often suffer from factual inaccuracies because of the confusion of war, but the inaccuracies do not detract from the truth (Sheehan 1988:305–307).

But Lansdale was more than a historian without meaning to be one—he was also a superb accidental folklorist. His unedited field tapes, deposited at the Hoover Institution Archives at Stanford University in 1980, include 68 tapes of SLO staff, friends and visitors recorded in Saigon and Virginia between 1968 and 1975 and nine additional tapes of songs by American servicemen. There are also 18 tapes of Vietnamese music, including seven of the music of the Lien Minh, guerrilla troops under Trinh Minh The, recorded 1954–55; songs by the Vung Tao Choir, a cadre group of trainees at the Revolutionary Development at Vung Tao; three tapes of miscellaneous Vietnamese music and one tape of Viet Cong songs. There are also ten tapes of music from the Philippines (McCluggage 1981:1–3). As a collection of occupational folk-songs, his work is unmatched for breadth of conception and for recognition of a living tradition at the time of its creation. No one else who collected military folksongs has thought of documenting, during the war, the songs of civilians serving in the combat zone, allied troops, and the enemy.

Folklorists have spent a good deal of time arguing about the pros and cons of applied folklore over the past twenty years. Those engaged in these esoteric discussions have often overlooked the fact that other people have been operating effectively in an area that we tend to consider our own province. In Lansdale we have a superb example of a highly skilled practitioner of applied folklore—a man who not only collected the material, but used it efficiently and with extreme sophistication.

Notes

The songs mentioned in the text are from my own collection or from the Lansdale tapes in the Library of Congress. For information about radio in Vietnam I am indebted to Roger Steffens, Larry Suid, and Alexis Muellner. Dick Jonas, Lem Genovese, Emily Strange, Joseph Tusso, Bull Durham, Hershel Gober, Mike Staggs, Saul Broudy, and Bill Ellis told me about making and performing songs in Vietnam. Bill Getz, Les Cleveland, and Frank Smith have been unfailingly helpful in supplying material from their own Vietnam collections and comparative texts from other wars. Dick Koeteeuw and Tuck Boys found superb in-country tapes for me. Cynthia Johnston and Steve Brown, producers of *Song of Vietnam*, graciously made copies of their own interview tapes for me and introduced me to singers and to members of Lansdale's Saigon SLO team. Baird Straughan, of Radio Smithsonian, also gave me copies of his interviews with singers. Chuck Rosenberg tracked down songs and references and patiently translated military terms. Cecil Currey, Lansdale's biographer, has been extraordinarily generous in giving me access to the material he has amassed. Marylou Gjernes, Army Art Curator of the U.S. Army Center of Military History, found three wonderful paintings of soldiers making music in Vietnam and made my visit to the Army Art Collection delightful. Elena Danielson, associate archivist at the Hoover Institution Archives at Stanford University, treated me like visiting royalty and guided me through the intricacies of the Lansdale manuscript and tape collections there. Pat Lansdale gave me the tapes that were still in her husband's possession at the time of his death and has been a gracious hostess on my trips to Washington. Joseph Baker, George Allen, Bernard Yoh, Lucien Conein, Dolf Droge, James Bullington, and Joseph Johnston shared their memories of Lansdale in Saigon and Washington, parties at his villa at 194 Cong Ly, and singing at the Cosmos Bar. Joseph Baker also gave me his tapes of Lansdale's Saigon parties and of the two edited collections, which have been invaluable, and he and Lucien Conein very kindly read the manuscript of this article. To all of these people, and to Michael Licht, who first brought the Lansdale tapes to my attention, I am deeply grateful.

¹Several of Barry Sadler's songs are set to traditional tunes and are definitely within the boundaries of military occupational folksong. Even his best-selling "Ballad of the Green Berets," which he claims to have written in a whorehouse in Nuevo Laredo, is clearly related to the unit-song tradition (Scroft 1989:35). A cassette of his 1966 album continues to sell well at the Special Forces Museum at Fort Bragg.

²Lansdale's notes and memos on the subject of Vietnamese folklore are in box 62, folder 1619, of the Lansdale collection at the Hoover Institution Archives at Stanford University.

³Oddly enough, transcriptions of some of these songs turned up in the documentary evidence submitted in the libel trial of General Westmoreland versus CBS (Ritter 1986:3).

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Appendix: Texts from the Lansdale Collection

Song: Chu Yen

Singers: Merrymen, 173rd Assault Helicopter Company

Tune: New York Girls

Lansdale Number: Songs by Americans in the Vietnam War, 90

Tapes of this song, performed by the Merrymen, circulated widely among Army helicopter pilots, but the song was also known to Air Force pilots.

Now listen, pilots, unto me, I'll tell you of my song,
When I left the shores of old Nha Trang and I landed at Saigon.

Chorus: Hello, Chu Yen, my dear Chu Yen
All you Saigon girls, can't you dance the polka?

As I walked down Flower Street, a fair maid I did meet,
She asked me please to see her home, she lived on Tu Do Street.

Now if you're willing, come with me, and you can have a treat,
You can have a glass of Saigon Tea or Bau Muoi Ba Thirty-Three.

Chorus: Dear Chu Yen, my dear Chu Yen
All you Saigon girls, can't you dance the polka?

Well, we walked for an hour or two, and finally found her hut,
Papasan was a VC, Mamasan chewed betel nut.

Chorus: Dear Chu Yen, my dear Chu Yen
All you Saigon girls, can't you dance the polka?

When I awoke next morning, I had an aching head,
My pocketbook was empty and my lady friend had fled.

Now looking round this little room, I couldn't see a thing,
But a poster saying, "Yankee, Go Home," and a picture of Ho Chi Minh.

Chorus: Where is Chu Yen, my dear Chu Yen?
She can do a lot of things, but she can't dance the polka.

Well, I've come to this conclusion, all pilots need a rest,
But if you go to Saigon, your morals it will test.

Well, the moral of this story, don't be a sinner,
Stop going down to Saigon, try the Red Cross Recreation Center.

Chorus: Goodbye, Chu Yen, farewell nuoc mam
I'm trading in my aching head, I'll try a doughnut dolly.
Please pass the cookies, I want a glass of Kool-Aid,
I'm a Red Cross girl, I want to dance the polka.
All you U.S. girls, can't you dance the polka.
(Cha Cha Cha)

Song: Hello, Ubon Tower (The Ballad of Machete Two)

Singer and Author: Captain Dick Jonas, 8th Tactical Fighter Wing

Tune: Wabash Cannon Ball

Lansdale Number: Songs by Americans in the Vietnam War, 122

This song was widely known in the Korean War as "Itazuke Tower." It was sung in Vietnam by helicopter pilots as "Phan Rang Tower" (Broudy 1969:37a), and by Air Force fighter pilots as "Ashau Tower" (Durham 1970:70), "Cam Ranh Tower" (Tuso 1971:9-10; Getz 1986:HH4-5), and "The Ballad of Machete Two" (Tuso 1971:21-22; Getz 1986:HH5-6).

"Hello, Ubon Tower, this here's Machete Two,
It's raining on the runway, oh Lord, what will I do?
My gas tank's getting empty, and I am puckered tight,
Tell me, Colonel Gibson, why must we fly at night?"

"Hello there, Machete, do you see the runway's end?
'Cause if you don't then go around and we'll try once again";
"Machete Two is on the go, I need some JP-4,
Just let me hit the tanker, and then we'll try once more."

"Lion, I need vectors out to Blue Anchor Plane,
Please expedite the joinup, I'm flying in the rain.
I've got to hit the tanker, 'cause I sure need some gas,
If he ain't got no JP-4, then he can kiss my ass."

"Hello there, Machete, Lion here, you're three miles out,
I'll have you on Blue Anchor soon, of that there is no doubt.
Oops, disregard the last word, you're fifty miles in trail;
If you will just be patient, this time I will not fail."

"Hello Lion, Machete, you can't mean fifty miles,
I'm reading seven hundred pounds here on my gas tank dials.
I'm heading back to Ubon, I'll try it one more time,
The truth about my chances is that they ain't worth a dime."

"My throttle's back at idle, descending at max glide,
If we don't make it this time, we'll have to let it slide.
We've got it on the runway, pulled off and turned about,
Good Lord, look at those gauges, both engines just flamed out!"

"Hello, Ubon Tower, this here's Machete Lead,
I'm standing by my airplane in mud up to my knees.
I don't know just what happened, I'd like to tell you how,
Won't you send the crew truck, I'd like to come in now."

"Hello there, Machete, this here is Ubon Tower,
Just make a left three-sixty, you'll be down within the hour.
We've got some TAC departures, lined up on the other end,
Just let me get them airborne, and you can come on in."

"Ubon Tower, Machete, you just don't understand,
We are no longer flying, we're setting in the sand.

Our airplane is inverted and lying on its back,
So come and take us home, I'm tired and I wanna hit the sack."

"Machete, Ubon Tower, you say you're on the ground?
You know without a clearance that you can't set her down.
If you have violated regs you know you'll have to wait.
Machete, do you hear me?" "I hear you, FSH!"

The moral of my story is if you're low on gas,
Just get it on the runway and only make one pass.
On unprepared dirt runways—now listen carefully—
You know it is illegal to land the F4D!

Song: Downtown

Singer and Author: Captain Dick Jonas, 8th Tactical Fighter Wing

Tune: Downtown

Lansdale Number: Songs by Americans in the Vietnam War, 119

Versions of this song also appear in Durham (1970:38–39), Getz (1981:D6) and Tusó (1971:8).

When you get up at two o'clock in the morning
You can bet you'll go—downtown.
Shaking in your boots, you're sweating heavy all over
'Cause you've got to go—downtown.

Smoke a pack of cigarettes before the briefing's over,
Wishing you weren't bombing, wishing you were flying cover;
It's safer that way. The flack is much thicker there,
You know you're biting your nails and you're pulling your hair;
You're going downtown, where all the lights are bright,
Downtown, you'd rather switch than fight,
Downtown, hope you come home tonight,
Downtown, downtown.

Planning the route you keep hoping that you
Won't have to go today—downtown.
Checking the weather and it's scattered to broken
So you still don't know—downtown.

Waiting for the guys in TOC to say you're cancelled,
Hoping that the words they give will be what suits your fancy.
Don't make me go. I'd much rather RTB.
So you sit and you wait, thinking, foxtrot, sierra, hotel.
And I'm going downtown, but I don't want to go
Downtown. That's why I'm feeling low.
Downtown, going to see Uncle Ho,
Downtown, downtown.

Spoken: Missile Force, burners now . . .
Barracuda has sweeping guns . . .
Disregard the launch light—no threat . . .

What do you mean, no threat? There's a pair at two o'clock!
Take it down!

Sung: Downtown.

Song: Mow the Little Bastards Down (Strafe the Town and Kill the People)

Singers: Pilots of 8th Tactical Fighter Wing, Ubon Mess

Tune: Wake the Town and Tell the People

Lansdale Number: Songs by Americans in the Vietnam War, 132

Getz (1986:16–17) includes two Vietnam War variants of this song. I also have several taped and one manuscript version.

Strafe the town and kill the people,
Drop your napalm in the square.
Take off early Sunday morning;
Catch them while they're still at prayer.

Drop some candy to the orphans;
And as the kiddies gather round,
Use your twenty millimeters,
To mow the little bastards down.

Spoken: Isn't that sweet?

Song: Silver Wings (Green Flight Pay)

Singer: Merryman, 173rd Assault Helicopter Company

Tune: Ballad of the Green Berets

Lansdale Number: Songs by Americans in the Vietnam War, 88

The song, sung by the Merryman, circulated widely via tape in Vietnam. It is also included in Broudy (1969:64).

Green beret . . .

Chorus: Silver wings upon my chest,
I fly my chopper above the best.
I can make more dough that way,
But I don't need no green beret.

Tennis shoes upon his feet,
Some folks call him "Sneaky Pete."
He sneaks around the woods all day,
And wears that funny green beret.

Chorus

It's no jungle floor for me,
I've never seen a rubber tree.
A thousand men will take some test,
While I fly home and take a rest.

Chorus

And while I fly my chopper home,
I leave him out there all alone.
That is where Green Berets belong,
Out in the jungle writing songs.

Chorus

And when my little boy is grown,
Don't leave him out there all alone.
Just let him fly and give him pay,
'Cause he can't spend no green beret.

And when my little boy is old,
His silver wings all lined with gold,
He'll also wear a green beret,
In the big parade St. Patrick's Day!

Chorus

Green beret . . .

Song: McNamara's Band

Singer: Written and sung by Dolf Droge, USIA

Tune: McNamara's Band

Lansdale Number: Songs by Americans in the Vietnam War, 31

Oh, me name is McNamara, I've got a special band,
And every couple of weeks or so I fly to old Vietnam.
I assemble the troops, count communist groups, and while the choppers fall,
I hurry home to tell you, sure, it's not so bad after all.

La, la, la, la, we are winning!
La, la, la, la, yes, we are winning!

Computers roar, we tally the score, the Vietcong blaze away,
And hardly a government flag survives after the close of day.
But have no fear, victory's near, that is plain to see;
I don't believe the *New York Times*, just rely on me.

La, la, la, la, we are winning!
La, la, la, la, yes, we are winning!

Song: Air America

Singer: Written and sung by Jim Bullington, Foreign Service

Tune: God Bless America

Lansdale Number: Songs by Americans in the Vietnam War, 142

Damned Air America,
You're always late.
You do hound us and confound us,
Our desire for to travel is great.

From old Saigon,
 To dear Danang,
 To the airport citadel,
 Damned Air America can go to hell.
 Damned Air America can go to hell.

Song: Pacified This Land One Hundred Times
 Singer: Written and sung by Bill Stubbs, USIS
 Tune: 500 Miles
 Lansdale Number: Songs by Americans in the Vietnam War, 143

If you work for OCO, you will know RD is slow,
 We have pacified this land a hundred times.

Chorus: A hundred times, a hundred times, a hundred times, a hundred times,
 We have pacified this land a hundred times.

There's a hamlet that I know, where the cadre come and go,
 We have pacified this land a hundred times.

Chorus

Got pajamas on my back, and of course the color is black,
 We have pacified this land a hundred times.

Chorus

RD is a parlor game, pacification is the same,
 We have pacified this land one hundred times.

Chorus

Song: Montagnard Sergeant
 Singer: Cosmos Tabernacle Choir
 Tune: My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean
 Lansdale Number: Songs by Americans in the Vietnam War, 33

This song is widely known in camp and fraternity, as well as military tradition. Getz (1981:11–12) who comments that it is a “very popular song among airmen,” found versions in 15 Air Force Song Books. The Cosmos Command version is printed in *Songs of Saigon*, an undated dittoed collection of Cosmos Bar songs.

My mother's a Montagnard sergeant,
 She draws jump pay and quarters to boot,
 She lives in Saigon on per diem,
 And always has plenty of loot.

Chorus: Stay here, stay here,
 Oh, don't let the program go down, go down.
 Stay here, stay here,
 'Cause Saigon's a real swinging town.

My father's a part-time guerrilla,
He gives all the ARVN a fit,
By selling for twenty piastres
A do-it-yourself ambush kit.

Chorus

My sisters all work in the taverns,
They encourage the soldiers to roam,
Drink up 'cause you'll soon leave your loved ones,
And back to your wives back at home.

Chorus

My brother's a poor missionary,
He saves all the girls from sin,
He'll save you a girl for five dollars,
My God, how the money rolls in.

Chorus

My grandpa sells cheap prophylactics,
He punctures each head with a pin,
While grandma grows rich on abortions,
My God, how the money rolls in.

Chorus

Song: Co Van My (My American Adviser)

Singer: Jim Bullington, Foreign Service

Tune: Wabash Cannon Ball

Lansdale Number: Songs by Americans in the Vietnam War, 42

A typed five-page broadside version of this ballad states that it "was composed at Quang Ngai by Captains T. C. Cooper and L. F. DeMouche, October, 1965." Verses were added by various singers, including the present performer.

You have heard of mighty warriors, you have heard of deadly fights,
When broadswords clashed and cannon flashed through bloody days and nights.
There's many a fearsome fighting man in the halls of history,
But they can't hold a candle to the brave young Co Van My.

The Russian revolution would have never come to pass,
If the Co Van My had been there to advise the ruling class.
Ho Chi Minh would be a Democrat if they were on his team,
And China's dark ambitions would be a foolish dream.

Napoleon flourished briefly, but his empire soon collapsed,
Cleopatra's dreams of glory terminated with an asp.
Caesar had his Brutus, but anyone can see.
These people would have made it if they'd had a Co Van My.

The ordinary Co Van can play a thousand parts,
From a deadly jungle killer to a patron of the arts.

He will talk of epic struggles, days of blood and fire and sweat,
He'll be written up in *Newsweek*, but he ain't seen a VC yet.

The only VC that he's seen cut grass at his mess hall,
So he took his trusty Pen double E and down he mowed them all.
Now he has photographic proof of legions of VC,
And he'll build a lie as high as the sky about being a Co Van My.

Spoken: The S2 is the intelligence adviser.

The S2 sits behind the desk and sighs and moans and flaps,
Chasing mythical battalions across outdated maps.
With "probably" and "possibly" and "indications are,"
He worries hell out of the men who try to fight the war.

He paints a picture of despair as he talks of the VC might,
A crow of evil omen, only his eyes are bright.
He speaks of hordes and legions, and cannon hid in huts,
He scares hell out of Saigon, but Division thinks he's nuts.

At winning paper victories the S3 has no peer,
As he sits down at the O club with his whiskey and his beer.
He'll never lose a battle, he'll always win that fight,
But his TOC gets mortared every other night.

The JB's daily recon is the terror of the beach,
Calling naval gunfire missions on everything in reach.
He sees VC in every hootch, supplies in every boat,
He's killed one hundred fishermen, twelve chickens, and a goat.

The naval gunfire spotter is professionally proud,
He's never hit a target, but his guns are awfully loud.
"Delay fuse, right eight hundred," the cruisers pitch and lurch,
"Cease fire, end of mission, boys, we got that VC church."

Spoken: Now we're going down to Saigon where there was a special brand of Co Van My—
the further they got away from the combat, the more heavily armed they traveled.

He wears a jungle uniform and he moves with a tiger's stealth,
He keeps his weapons sharp and clean and he's careful of his health.
He moves with a heavy escort, in danger every day.
And he drives to Cho Lon twice a week to earn his combat pay.

His shirt is open to the breeze, his hat's down over his eye,
A Thompson's slung across his back, there's a pistol on each thigh.
Grenades are fastened to his belt, there's a knife in either boot,
As he drives his forklift up and down the streets of Than Son Nhut.

Song: Arrivederci, Saigon

Singer: Cosmos Tabernacle Choir

Tune: Arrivederci Roma

Lansdale Number: Songs by Americans in the Vietnam War, 15

Arrivederci, Saigon,
We hope you win your war.
I'm looking for a job in Bangkok,
I'm looking for a job in Hong Kong,
I'm looking for a sinecure in Singapore.

The Viet Cong steal our weapons,
The Viet Cong hold them tight.
Now they're raiding our strategic hamlets,
Now they're raiding our strategic hamlets,
Wonder where the Bao An and the Dan Ve are tonight.

The Bao An steal our chickens,
The Dan Ve steal our rice.
And the hamlet chief is selling bulgar,
With the GVN acting so vulgar,
Is it any wonder the VC seem so nice?

Where are the Special Forces?
They're not on our frontier.
They are beating up the nuns and bonzes,
They are beating up the nuns and bonzes,
That's the reason for the shooting that you hear.

They send us lots of colonels,
With chickens on their necks.
They are working in coordination,
They are working in coordination,
They are making plans to win the war atop the Rex.

Arrivederci, Saigon,
We hope you win your war.
I'm looking for a job in Bangkok,
I'm looking for a job in Hong Kong,
I'm looking for a sinecure in Singapore.